

Streaming I: The Arts

With this article and two to follow, I will be getting more specific about opportunities for libraries to expand programming services to the community, for free or at low cost to the library. This article will focus on the Arts, theater specifically.

Stratford, Ontario is a picturesque small city, population about 33,000, on the little Avon River north of Lake Erie and east of the lower part of Lake Huron. It is a couple of hours from Toronto and about 6-7 hours from Murrysville. Unlike Murrysville, it is surrounded by very flat farmland, but, on the riverside rise in the center of town there sits the picture-postcard Stratford Library. It stands as only one symbol of this community's deep commitment to the Arts.

Stratford Library is within easy walking distance of four amazing theatres, all in this one small town, homes to North America's largest classical repertory company, homes to Shakespearean plays, non-Shakespearean plays, musicals, and forums of all kinds. Its signature theatre is the Festival Theatre, grandly overseeing Lake Victoria, a bulge in the Avon. Its world-class annual Festival draws many thousands of people from Toronto and Montreal and everywhere else. Normally. But, in 2020, because of COVID-19, all Stratford's theatres went dark for a whole season. (Bars get to stay open, but theaters are dark!) Even its brand new, founder namesake Tom Patterson Theatre, which has yet to play a play, is dark.

So, the Stratford Festival has a new model for how to survive and serve its patrons; it is called stratfest@home (<https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/Subscription>). For \$10/month, a patron can buy an introductory subscription (so priced until year-end) for viewing Stratford legacy and original productions, as well as forum events. This model is a lot like that of a book club, the patron committing to a regular cost for a promised selection of books. In the Stratford case, the many selections so far include plays such as Twelfth Night, Long Day's Journey into Night, and Love's Labor Lost. All offered by one of the world's premier repertory theatre companies.

From a library's point of view, there is another, related model to be had. It is this. The library buys the subscription to Stratford's offerings, not unlike it now does for both magazines and e-books; one subscription for all! It provides patron access to the content by streaming plays at the library at given times for the public. All the library needs are a large screen TV and a space designated to streaming content for group viewing. The space, for effect, is furnished to suggest a little theater, to provide a proper ambience.

Actually, the Murrysville Community Library (MCL) is on its way to having just such a space; multipurpose uses include children's programming (when we can resume having group programming safely), Arts, and STEM programming. It is called TechNook, and it is being brought to life with very generous in-kind support from the local architectural firm Design 3 Architecture. Design 3 Architecture also was the architectural firm for the expansion and reconstruction of the Children's Room several years ago. Thank you

Design 3 Architecture! And thank you too for a family Memorial Donation that makes this all possible.

As conceived right now, the little theater will open out into the main reading area from what is currently an art display area. It will not be defined by any additional walls. It will be defined by differentiated carpeting, and painting of existing walls (with Municipality of Murrysville approval). The large-area TV will be wall-mounted, and seating will be on floor mats, for children, or imported chairs for adults. For the time being, because of COVID-19, we will forgo the headphones that were intended. Design plans and budgets are scheduled for approval this year. So, stay tuned. I'll update you on that in the future, and you can expect that subsequent articles will inform you as well about other kinds of content being planned for streaming.

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